

English Department Writing Benchmarks for Dissertating Students

Different dissertation projects may place different demands on students. Some dissertations have a heavier research component up front, for example, while other projects allow students to begin drafting immediately. The first chapter often takes longer for students to write, as they master the greater complexity of argument and scale required by a dissertation chapter.

The benchmarks below are designed to give a sense of what the graduate program considers satisfactory progress on the dissertation. These are minimal benchmarks. Students who have not met these benchmarks will be required to enroll in the Dissertation Writing Workshop as a condition of continued funding. Significant departure from these benchmarks may result in a pause or discontinuation in funding. Note that these benchmarks are designed to ensure completion by the seventh year; however, funding is only guaranteed through year six. Seventh year funding (available through external fellowships or Writing Program TAs) is increasingly unstable. Students may therefore wish to establish more ambitious goals in consultation with their advisors.

Students and advisors should also establish a plan for how, and how much, students should incorporate article publication, conference presentation, and other professional activities while making progress on the dissertation. Depending on these goals, students should consider enrolling in the Article Writing Workshop (offered only in fall) as well as the Dissertation Writing Workshop. Both the Dissertation Writing Workshop and the Article Writing Workshop may be repeated.

4th year

Dissertation proposals are due on September 15 of the 4th year in the program. Students must attend the Dissertation Proposal Workshop run by the ADGS in late May, after completion of orals, in preparation for competing the proposal by the September 15th deadline. Students should strongly consider enrolling in the Dissertation Writing workshops in either fall or spring of their fourth year.

Students making satisfactory progress will have a substantial portion (20+ continuous pages) of their first chapter in draft by the April 1 deadline in their fourth year, with a revised and completed chapter turned in and approved by the end of the summer, before the beginning of the 5th year. Please keep in mind that this draft needs to be approved by the dissertation director, which means it needs to be submitted to the director for feedback several weeks before the April 1 deadline. Students should be in touch with their dissertation director continuously during both the writing of the proposal and the writing of their first chapter draft.

5th year

Fifth-year students making satisfactory progress will have completed a first chapter and drafted a second by January of their fifth year, with the minimal expectation of having a second chapter completed and approved by the end of spring semester. Fifth year students will normally hold a departmental Dissertation Fellowship. It is important to capitalize on

the time afforded by this fellowship; we recommend that fifth year students consider enrolling in the Dissertation Writing workshops in fall or spring.

Fifth year students should also plan to attend the Fellowship Workshop run by the ADGS in October and should strongly consider applying for an external dissertation fellowship to be held in the 6th year. Fifth years may also apply for a Raritan (departmental), SAS Mellon, and/or SGS Bevier Fellowship. Note that eligibility for these fellowships is based on solid demonstratable progress on the dissertation. The SAS Mellon and SGS Bevier Fellowships are terminal fellowships; students who hold these fellowships are not eligible for further Rutgers funding, including TAs. Students should not apply to these opportunities if they are not confident they can complete the dissertation during the fellowship year.

6th year

Sixth-year students making satisfactory progress will have completed a minimum of two chapters and have drafted the third by the time they file their Dissertation Writer's Report (January of the sixth year).

Sixth year students must meet with their directors at the beginning of their sixth year to discuss completion plans; they should also contact other committee members early in their sixth year to apprise them of their plans. Sixth year students should also consider attending the Job Seekers Orientation meeting in early fall, whether or not they intend to be on the job market in their sixth year.

Budgetary constraints mean that funding is not guaranteed in the 7th year. Students who have completed 3 or nearly 3 chapters will receive priority for available TA assignments in the 7th year. Sixth year students may also apply for an SAS Mellon and/or SGS Bevier Fellowship, as well as external fellowships, to be held in the seventh year.

7th year

Students in their seventh year should be writing their final chapter(s) and introduction with the plan to defend in April or October. Seventh year students should also plan on attending the Job Seekers Orientation meeting in early fall as well as the fall Fellowship Workshop, to prepare them to apply to postdoctoral fellowships.

NOTE: the above benchmarks are based on a seven-year track, even though funding for the seventh year is not guaranteed. If you intend to finish within six years, you should follow the recommended benchmarks below:

4th year: Proposal and Chapter 1. Submit abstracts to conferences.

5th year: Chapters two and three. Submit an article for publication.

6th year: Chapter four and conclusion. Employment/post-doc search.

Important departmental deadlines

Dissertation Proposal due on September 15 of the 4th year.

Progress reports due to the department on January 15 of each year spent writing the dissertation.